



PRESS RELEASE

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DEWHURST DEDICATES CLYDE W. COSPER TEXAS STATE VETERANS HOME IN CEREMONY ATTENDED BY WITNESSES TO NAMESAKE'S HEROISM

BONHAM—Texas Land Commissioner David Dewhurst today dedicated the Clyde W. Cospers Texas State Veterans Home in Bonham, in a ceremony featuring dramatic eyewitness accounts of the last heroic actions of the home's namesake.

"I can't think of a better day to dedicate a veterans home than Memorial Day," Dewhurst said. "Clyde Cospers sacrificed his life to save others, just like countless American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, who must never be forgotten."

Dewhurst said 2nd Lt. Clyde W. Cospers, of Dodd City, nicknamed "Sparky," faced a difficult choice the morning of Nov. 13, 1943. The nine-man crew of his stricken B-17 bomber had just bailed out while Cospers struggled to fly the craft straight and level for them. The bomber, named *Miriam* after his mother, would impact the ground in seconds, but he still had time to save himself.

Then Cospers saw the small English town of Princes Risborough, its population swollen by refugees, many of them children, from the Nazi bombing of London. He knew what would happen if his three-ton bomb load and thousands of gallons of fuel struck the sleepy community. Disregarding his own safety, Cospers stayed put, barely avoiding the town as he crashed in an open field and died in the resulting blast. For his actions that day, he was honored with the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal and the Purple Heart.

"America has always been blessed with selfless heroes like Sparky Cospers," Dewhurst said. "He and his fellow veterans protected us from tyranny, often at the cost of their young lives. I can think of no words that do proper justice to their memory."

Dewhurst welcomed a number of special guests to the Memorial Day ceremony, including Chuck Vondrachek, of Two Rivers, Wisconsin, the last living member of Cospers' crew. Vondrachek, who survived 25 bomber missions and was decorated eight times for heroism, bears a deep respect for Cospers.

"I'm sure he could have bailed out if he wanted to," Vondrachek said. "I think he was trying to clear the town. He wanted to save the townsfolk. He wanted to park that plane where it wouldn't take anyone's life. He was a hero; all of us thought that. No man could go through that without being a hero."

Maureen Knopp, an eyewitness to Cospers' heroics, traveled from England to attend today's event in Bonham. Knopp was 11 years old when she rushed outside and saw *Miriam* skimming just above the rooftops, and heard it explode moments later. That memory made such an impression that decades later, in 1991, she tracked down Cospers' identity and led a successful campaign to establish a memorial to him in Princes Risborough.

"I always remembered this pilot; he was my pilot," Knopp said. "If he had jumped out with his crew, that plane could have landed on us."

Jimmie Lois Cospers, a childhood friend of Cospers and his sister-in-law, also attended the ceremony. She remembers Cospers as a handsome young man with dark brown eyes and auburn hair.

"He was a good student who loved hunting and fishing, and played catcher on his high school baseball team," she said. "He was a very determined person, and just 21 years old when he died."

Dewhurst's father also was a highly decorated World War II bomber pilot. On one memorable mission in his B-26 Marauder, legendary journalist Edward R. Murrow hitched a ride. Dewhurst said American bomber pilots in World War II had a life expectancy of about 15 missions.

"Young men, like Sparky, always suffer disproportionately in war," Dewhurst said. "We must never forget the price they paid to preserve our freedom. That's why Memorial Day, and programs that help our veterans, like the new Texas State Veterans Home here in Bonham, are so important."

Dewhurst said each of the Texas State Veterans Homes in Temple, Floresville, Big Spring and Bonham have 160 beds in large private and semi-private rooms. Dewhurst said each state veterans home offers a wide array of health care services, a comprehensive rehabilitation program, special diets, recreational activities, social services, a library, a gift shop and a secure 32-bed Alzheimer's wing.

"This home is a win-win for Texas veterans, Texas taxpayers and the people of Fannin County," Dewhurst said. "Veterans will receive affordable, skilled-nursing care in a home designed for their needs; taxpayers won't pay a dime for the home's operation; and the county and city will get an economic infusion."

Dewhurst, a U.S. Air Force veteran and Chairman of the Texas Veterans Land Board (VLB), said approximately 500,000 of Texas' 1.6 million veterans are 65 or older.

"America owes so much to brave veterans like Sparky Cosper and Chuck Vondrachek," Dewhurst said. "They and their fellow veterans have given so much and asked for so little in return. We must always remember that the peace we enjoy today was made possible through their sacrifices."

Dewhurst was joined at the ceremony by Sen. David H. Cain, D-Dallas; Rep. Mark S. Homer, D-Paris; Rep. Ron Clark, R-Sherman; and Texas Veterans Land Board Members Ladd Pattillo and Mike Ussery.

Boy Scout Troop 260 carried out the posting of the colors at the ceremony, and Clyde Cosper's great nephews, Caleb and Simon Cosper, led the audience in the pledge of allegiance.

Dewhurst said he's grateful to sponsors of the event, including American Bank of Texas, Bonham Chrysler, Bonham State Bank, Care Inns of Texas, LTD., Carter-Wood Motor Company, Fannin Bank, Fannin County Electric Cooperative, Inc., First National Bank of Trenton, Foxworth-Galbraith Lumber Co., and TXU Electric & Gas.

Dewhurst also thanked the following contributors to Monday's ceremony: A.E.'s Flower Shop, Bonham Floral and Green House, First Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church, Northeast Medical Center, Red River Catering, The Gift House and Florist, VA North Texas Health Care System, and Wal-Mart Supercenter.

Dewhurst said detailed information on Texas State Veterans Homes, as well as VLB home, land and home improvement loans for Texas veterans, can be obtained by calling (800) 252-VETS, or by accessing the Texas General Land Office Web site at www.glo.state.tx.us/vlb.

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